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ABSTRACT

The California School Boards Association (CSBA) established a task force to define the term "character education" and to clarify the needs of the public schools for curricula and instructional materials supporting character education. This report synthesizes the results of the task force's efforts. The failure of U.S. society's formal and informal educational systems to instill clear moral, ethical, and social values in young people is documented first. The report then describes the character education concept as education in several virtues that are required to maintain a democratic and humane society, notably altruism, compassion, courage, courtesy, generosity, honesty, industriousness, integrity, loyalty, obedience, punctuality, respect for authority, responsibility, self-discipline, self-respect, and tolerance. The role of boards of education in fostering and supporting character education efforts is described next, followed by recommendations for action by the CSBA. The report also suggests, very briefly, how school districts can find, recognize, and develop successful character education programs. (PGD)

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A Reawakening

Character Education and The Role of the School Board Member

Prepared by the Character Education Task Force
of the California School Boards Association • August 1982

EA 015 432

"I am not a teacher, but an awakener."

Robert Frost

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Foreword
The Work of the Task Force

More than 800 hours of meeting time and outside study were devoted to task force responsibilities for defining character education, developing a plan for addressing the needs of society today through ethical standards, and replying to the challenge of school districts crying out for help in dealing with student misbehavior, violent acts, and an apathetic society.

Our research included a written and telephone survey of 128 school districts in California, the Senate Select Committee Compendium available from the Senate Education Committee, the CSBA files, and the complete research files compiled by Senator Rodda's Senate Select Committee on Innovative School Finance and Character Education.

Members of the task force got down to their chores immediately. First, the philosophies and ethical standards of the individual members were shared so that each could know where the other "was coming from." A continual source of discussion was the definition of words and what those words meant to task force members, to board members at large, to society as a whole. At times, there was tension amongst the task force members as divergent opinions surfaced, were dissected, modified, and then built into the report.

In answer to those who say we are doing a character education curriculum right along, we question whether this is indeed being done. Somehow, we need to make the distinction between what we *hope* is happening in the classroom and what is indeed happening.

The task force urges CSBA to continue to study the role of public schools in the development of character education. We further urge every school board to address this challenge which has become a crucial concern of our society.

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"We sow a thought and reap an act;
We sow an act and reap a habit;
We sow a habit and reap a character;
We sow a character and reap a destiny."

William Makepeace Thacheray

The Need For Character Education

The following presentation represents a synthesis of efforts by the California School Boards Association Task Force on Character Education to define the term "character education" and to identify the need for curriculum and instructional materials for use in the public schools.

The United States does not lack technical competence — in fact, such competence identifies our society. However, we have lost sight of the humanitarian aspects of these developments in our endeavor to increase our proficiency in technology.

Daily, our students are bombarded with messages that conflict with formation of strong ethical codes. Students continually view television in which highly paid entertainers perform provocative acts, speak unethically or immorally, and send out signals that what they do is perfectly correct and "honorable." There is no evaluation after such programs to help students differentiate between what is right and what is wrong.

Senses of youth are daily assailed by the type of music that sends out messages of "Everything is OK if I get my way." There is no countermessage that deals with the importance of working toward the common good and conducting oneself honorably.

Numerous surveys allude to the damage that continual television is inflicting on the young. Recent California state testing provides information that the number of hours spent watching television is in direct correlation to the drop in test scores.

Learning to cope with adolescence is a major concern in America today. Television constantly reminds young students that they can only be beautiful if they use certain products, that they can only succeed with the help of particular merchandise, that they can only hope to be happy if they buy what the advertiser is selling. When they discover the power of peer pressure to shape their lives and they have no strong base of values to fall back on, they find themselves in extremely stressful situations. Teenage suicide is on the rise, being the number two cause of death amongst teenagers. Confusion and despondency are two major factors influencing actions and decisions of youth. Much must be done to help students develop good self-images, despite the impact of television.

The inability of many youth to find employment leaves them with many, many hours unfulfilled with meaningful activities. The old adage, the devil finds work for idle hands, is most appropriate for the youth of today. Idle time has resulted in gang violence, cruising, drinking, and drug use. The value of work has been derided by some youth who refuse to work unless they receive the minimum wage for such occupations as babysitting, gardening, and dishwashing. Changes in attitude are crucial, and the reaffirmation of the work ethic in America must be addressed.

Again and again we witness the conflicts among the races of America. Because of these conflicts, we see a division of our youth rather than a bonding. Any activities that can increase or strengthen healthy attitudes among boys and girls of all races are desirable. The public school, which in former years was a melting pot, needs to address this problem and, once again, demonstrate to American society that there is room for all in a safe environment.

The family unit has become more and more unstable. In some communities, students seek gang interaction to replace family relationships that have deteriorated for a number of reasons: economical, emotional, and sociological. These gangs quite often have unhealthy motives and goals. Because there is no one to monitor their activities, to help channel their energies into productive and fruitful actions, these gangs often turn to terrorizing and vandalizing the students and schools of America.

It is essential that the family, whatever configuration it may be, be recognized as the primary environment for inculcating strong values and standards. Religious bodies can assist in this major task of helping families to find their way in this age of drugs, promiscuous sex, destruction of human life, and dishonesty.

Because too much emphasis has been placed on parents to be buddies to their children instead of models for good behavior and disciplinarians, many parents have lost the ability to discipline when necessary. Over and over, columnists state the need for parents to take back their responsibility for setting good examples. These columnists daily print the cries of children who write to them begging that their parents set limits — limits that many adults are unwilling to establish because it takes work, hard work.

Although parents are the first role models for children, teachers are the second. Teachers must reinforce signals that enable children to distinguish between right and wrong. Our society (and every society throughout the centuries) has established codes of ethics common to all. Human nature has not changed that much, if at all. Because teachers are crucial to this demonstration of ethics, they must be ready and willing to accept the responsibilities. They should be supported by the administration, and they should actively seek the assistance of parents or other adults in the home for teaching ethics.

Drugs are more available than ever before in our history. Because of this availablity and boredom, many students rely on drugs to help them escape. Planning programs of activity, which include healthy exercise and mental stimulation, will do much to decrease the use of drugs. Thus, any programs that demand that bodies and minds be used to a high degree should be actively supported in the curriculum.

All adults need to reevaluate their part in society. When they commit violent actions, they can only expect that such will be repeated by students. One of the factors listed by many surveys as contributing to the violence and vandalism we witness in society today is the disrespect for law and order and the lack of control on the part of people themselves. Messages must be forthright and continually forthcoming that ethical behavior is desirable, will result in a more harmonious society, and will produce a type of life that can support the needs of all.

Everyone needs a code of honor. The code is first learned in the home, then augmented and strengthened in the schools, and then supported by society at large. The attitudes and behavior of families, teachers, schools, society as a whole, and our expectations determine the quality of character.

What Is Character Education?

Character education is education in virtue.

Among the virtues we consider to be appropriate to a democratic and humane society are altruism, compassion, courage, courtesy, generosity, honesty, industriousness, integrity, loyalty, obedience, punctuality, respect for authority, responsibility, self-discipline, self-respect, and tolerance.

Democracy must have a personal ethic to succeed. Ethics can and should be taught. The schools share this responsibility with all of society.

Historically, character education focuses on the teaching of values and of conduct that produces behavior necessary for the orderly functioning of a humane and democratic society. The basis of such values includes elements that are unifying and elements that express our diversity.

Character education within the total curriculum will lead to the development of the individual as a literate, responsible, moral person, ready to take a place in a free society.

Drawing on ideas suggested by the motto *e pluribus unum*, one of America's respected scholars, R. Freeman Butts, classified principles into two general types:

1. Those which seem primarily to promote desirable cohesive and unifying elements in a democratic political community, or the "unum" values. Among them are these:
   - Justice
   - Equality
   - Truth
   - Authority
   - Responsibility
   - Participation
   - Respect for persons and property
   - Personal obligation for the public good
2. Those which seem primarily to promote desirable pluralistic and individualistic elements, or the "pluribus" values. Among them are these:
   - Diversity
   - Privacy
   - Freedom
   - Due process
   - Human rights

We recognize that there are other places in the world where people hold opinions similar to ours regarding a free society, but we have addressed ourselves to the precepts and foundations of our own free society. We believe that freedom is one of the prime motivating forces in character education and that there is no place in the world that more explicitly guarantees the freedom of the individual than here in the United States.

What Can We Do About Character Education?

The development of ethical ideas and appreciation for high standards of conduct should be emphasized throughout the instructional program.

Education is a lifelong process of learning and living. Our schools are dedicated to the challenge of providing the opportunity for individuals to gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to work and live successfully, and to assume the responsibilities inherent in a democratic society. Our schools must also inspire students to affect and improve society.

The roles of public education are to develop literate citizens capable of participating in our democratic society and assisting in the development of individual character.

Although character education must be a shared responsibility with the home, community, and religious bodies, boards can take the following steps to promote character education in the schools:

- Boards should assume responsibility for character education. Historically, public education for all in America has been justified by the need in a democratic society for literate, informed, and moral citizens.
- The electorate is accusing the schools of neglecting to teach character education. Therefore, based on historical precedent and on the demands of the community that the schools serve, we should assume the leadership in reaffirming the role of the schools in character education.
- Boards should conduct a needs assessment[1] in the community. We recognize that each community is unique. Therefore, each district should involve its community in determining the need for character education and the direction the program should take.
- Boards should be willing to set acceptable standards for behavior in the schools. We affirm the following statement made in the Violence and Vandalism Report published by CSBA in 1982 regarding lack of discipline:

  If we have learned anything over the years, it is that it is almost impossible to impose standards. All groups that are going to be affected by the standards must "buy into them." Discipline and control policies should be developed and implemented by school personnel, parents, and students working together. Communications should not be left to chance. Discipline policy must give firm and positive direction. Local school rules and regulations must identify standards of behavior that are clear, concise, and easily understood by parents, teachers, and students. The ultimate goal should be to train students to have self-direction and self-control.
- Boards of education should develop policies and guidelines to enable students to achieve the goals of character education. Goals identified by the task force include:
  1. To encourage students' ability to make responsible decisions and to be accountable for them.
  2. To develop in each student a respect for law.
  3. To develop in students an understanding of democratic processes.
  4. To develop in each student an understanding and respect for cultural, religious, and socioeconomic diversities.

5. To develop in each student a positive self-image.
6. To establish a lifelong interest in the well being of others, protecting the rights of all persons and groups.

Board members have major tasks facing them each day. They must be fiscally responsible to the public; they must set good policy, but most importantly, they must do what others do not want to do, and that is take responsibility for their students' behavior.

It is very easy to let "George do it," and George quite often has become the board of education which must be the disciplinarian for drug usage, for violent acts, for truancy, for dishonesty, along with establishing a teaching curriculum. Board members must enlist the help of their communities. They must be forthright and honest in admitting there are problems in the school district regarding student behavior, and then reach out to the community for help, support, and resolution.

Town hall meetings in each of the 1,043 school districts in California may be one answer. Another answer is to hold "think tank" meetings in which board members, community representatives, and students reveal what the problems are and search for solutions.

Each community is different. Task force members spent many hours insisting that what will work for one district may not work for another. There is no question that a district with 100 students does not have the magnitude of problems that a district with one-half million students has.

We urge board members to identify, by a variety of means, the prevailing problems in the district regarding student misbehaviour and then set goals for addressing those concerns.

How Do Districts Find, Recognize, and Develop Successful Character Education Programs?

In order to obtain the widest variety of materials, local boards or district committees should contact districts with successful ongoing programs. Names of these programs may be obtained from such organizations as the State Curriculum Association.

The task force is aware of certain programs in California and other states dealing with character education. Many California programs are identified by the Senate Select Committee On Innovations In School Finance and Character Education and described in the Summer, 1982 *California School Boards* journal. Although the task force does not endorse any program, study of such programs can promote valuable assistance in developing a district program.

Effective character education is best achieved by an "interdisciplinary approach." Teachers in all the curriculum disciplines influence significantly the moral behavior of their students.

- Programs for staff development need to reflect the district's commitment to character education. All school personnel should be a part of training efforts that recognize the need for the entire school community to be involved in the enhancement of character education programs and a positive school environment.
- Parent and family education programs should be an integral part of all character education programs. Local school districts should establish an ongoing working relationship with community groups, religious bodies, and other agencies concerned with the same values.

Recommendations For CSBA Action

There is more to board responsibilities than making the budget balance. Boards spend many, many hours on the fiscal requirements of their districts but not enough, we believe, on the final product of the educational system — a student who fits into a democratic society and helps shape a free society where everyone can live in harmony.

The need for character education is not new. Consider the following:

Our youth now love luxury, they have bad manners, contempt for authority, show disrespect for their elders, and love to chatter in place of exercise. They no longer rise

when others enter the room. They contradict their parents, they chatter before company, they gobble their food, and terrorize their teachers.

Sound familiar? Socrates said this in the Fifth Century, B.C. His words reveal that the need for behavioral reform has existed for at least 2500 years.

This task force recommends a variety of means for ensuring that character education remains a strong element in the curriculum. Board members need to educate themselves and their communities.

1. At CSBA's annual *summer curriculum conference*, such topics as self-discipline should be included. Board members who claim that character education is taking place daily in their curriculum could help by sharing their accomplishments with board members who feel that character education is lacking in their districts. Identifying the ways that ethics, values, morals, self-discipline, and standards are being incorporated in the curriculum could be the focus of several time slots in future summer curriculum conferences. Recalling the old adage that "We can learn from one another," CSBA should use board members to help other board members satisfy the need for character education curriculum.
2. There should be panel symposiums or workshops incorporated in the CSBA *annual conference* and one keynote speaker of nationwide recognition addressing the subject of morality, values, courage, and wisdom who will stimulate and challenge board members to action.
3. CSBA should sponsor *regional board development workshops* dealing with character education. We find that roundtable discussions and mind-stretching dialogue allow us to learn from one another. We recommend that lecture technique *not* be used to tell board members how to produce students who can cope in the democratic, technological society. We expect these discussions to produce creative solutions to our age-old problems.
4. We should never neglect the individual responsibility we have to host *community workshops* and include parents, teachers, administrators, and students in looking at this entire area of character education.
5. The task force further recommends that our CSBA Journal devote one of its eight issues per year to character education. The 1976 issue devoted to that topic was exemplary, and we commend CSBA for that effort. However, changing times warrant another sally.[1]

The need for updating and instruction is constant. We would hope that previous conferences and publications will create awareness and demand for additional programs on a statewide basis to upgrade our quality of life and improve information about the opportunities for character education.

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[1]*Community Action Plan*, California State Parent Teachers Association, 930 Georgia Street, Los Angeles, California 90015.

[2]See the June/July/August 1982 special issue on Character Education.

"The entire object of true education is to
make people not merely to do the right things,
but to enjoy doing them; not merely industrious,
but to love industry; not merely learned,
but to love knowledge; not merely pure,
but to love purity; not merely just,
but to hunger and thirst after justice."

John Ruskin